

Hohenfels Rescue Training Prepares to Save Lives

HOHENFELS, Germany – Most people associate Hohenfels' Joint Multinational Readiness Center with the development of warfighting skills. A lesser-known but equally important mission is training to save lives during disasters.

Each year, more than 500 host nation firefighters and emergency response personnel come to the Hohenfels Garrison for a training exercise called Aviation Rescue for Firefighters. The exercises are coordinated by Airfield Safety Manager Chance Clagett and garrison Deputy Fire Chief Gert Fuchs.

The majority of the first response personnel are volunteers from the four counties surrounding the Readiness Center. They come from their daily jobs to learn and practice rescue skills that will assist their local communities as well as those who live and work at the garrison and Readiness Center.

If an aircraft were to go down within the local community, local firefighters would be first on the scene. Upon notification of an accident to the JMRC/USAG Hohenfels, the on-station UH-60 MEDEVAC aircraft with firefighters and medics respond to assist with the local fire departments.

The most recent aircraft rescue exercise was conducted with responders from the communities of Muehlhausen and Burglengenfeld. The firefighters learned how to approach a downed aircraft and conduct emergency shutdown procedures, as well as assisting the crash scene "injured." A UH-1 Huey and UH-60 Blackhawk simulated hard landings with a fires.

With the UH-1, the local firefighters had to conduct a rapid crew extraction due to the simulated fire aboard the aircraft. The UH-60 gave the local firefighters an opportunity to extract the crew using a more thorough and comprehensive extraction program based upon simulated injuries that occurred to the crew.

In Muehlhausen, the firefighters had to remove the injured from the aircraft and carry them to safety. Once out of harm's way, an array of local medical personnel from the Bavarian Red Cross and other medical facilities conducted triage on each patient in preparation for transport to local hospitals. More than 160 volunteer first responders as well as personnel from the Bavarian Red Cross and the Crises Intervention Team with emergency equipments participated. The use of both aircraft – one Vietnam era and one modern -- offered the first responders the opportunity to learn the differences between slightly different aircraft.

The training, which reflects the close cooperation with host nation officials and the U.S. Army, has been ongoing since 1996. For the many townspeople who came from Muehlhausen to watch the event, it was live drama at its best. For the medical personnel, it was a chance to increase their emergency response expertise.

Clagett was supported by a host of installation staff to include Guenther Stoeckl, Fire Chief, Gert Fuchs, Deputy Chief, F&ES Hohenfels, and the Falcon Team and the UH-60 MEDEVAC aircraft flew in from the 45th Med out of Katterbach.

Through realistic scenarios, the training will help preserve lives, equipment and resources in the event of a serious aviation mishap within the four counties surrounding the JMRC. Clagett said the cooperation from the Host Nation was great and adds, “The end state of this training is that it benefited everyone, both on and off the JMRC. In the event of serious aircraft accident/incident precious lives, equipment, and the environment can be saved.”

(Story and photos by USAG HOHENFELS PAO Gerry Arbios)